

Pointing out environmental impacts in the focal zone that is not addressed by the actors main focus may otherwise lead to the impression that the product is best improved by other actors. Applying the concept of focal zones enables one to display both, the environmental impacts related to the decision scope of the actor, and those impacts outside that zone.

3 Conclusion

As neither the well established "whole system model" that is applied to better reflect the physical context of the object of analysis nor a very stringent restriction to a small number processes seems to be appropriate in all application situations, the focal zone concept enables a delimitation according to the actor's decision context. Focal zones allow for the definition and documentation of the various parts of a system model derived from the preferences, priorities and constraints related to the actor's goal, expressed in terms of a decision context in which a decision is to be taken.

A relatively reliable technique for streamlining an LCA is to set data quality requirements for non-dominant sub-processes lower and to enable the inclusion of estimates rather than precise inventory data [15]. As requirements on data quality, resolution, etc. can be different between focal zones, this concept forms a convenient way to include areas of various credibility and criticality to the decision process into the same product assessment without losing this fundamental information when interpreting the results.

As of now, focal zones seem to be an interesting piece for a mechanism still to be developed, that would allow for a clear derivation of a study scope from its goals. Conversely, focal zones can help decide whether given results taken from a database can be used for a new assessment.

In an application to building sector products, the concept of focal zones may aid practitioners in the consideration of the always-unknown future service life and end of life steps. Typical for the building sector is also the often unavoidable mixing of different system levels (product, building, building agglomeration) among the different actors. To put this clearly, the "product" changes with the life cycle stage, and it is not always possible to keep track of products in the life cycle of a building.

Finally, we would very much appreciate a forthcoming discussion on the issues related to the connection of the goal with the scope definition.

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